

Message Text

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ACTION AF-07

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 EB-04 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-03 H-01 INR-05

L-01 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15

USIA-06 IO-04 DRC-01 /058 W
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R 161251Z OCT 74

FM AMEMBASSY LUSAKA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 815

INFO AMCONSUL CAPE TOWN

AMEMBASSY PRETORIA

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CAPE TOWN FOR EMBASSY

EO 11652: N/A

TAGS: EAIR, PBOR, SF, ZA

SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICAN "MYSTERY PLANE" CRASH IN ZAMBIA

1. TWO-ENGINE, 4-SEATER PIPER AIRCRAFT OF SOUTH AFRICAN REGISTRY CRASHED AND BURNED ABOUT 1930 OI HOURS ON OCT 9 AT MWEKE NEAR MONGU IN ZAMBIA'S WESTERN PROVINCE. PASSENGER IDENTIFIED AS FRANCOIS JACOBUS LOTTER DIED, WHILE PILOT AND SECOND PASSENGER, IDENTIFIED AS DOUW GERBRAND STEYN AND PETER JOHANNES MYBURG LOUW RESPECTIVELY, WERE INJURED. ALL THREE REPORTED TO BE EMPLOYEES OF BANTU INVESTMENT CORPORATION OF WINDHOEK. (THERE TWO STORIES REFERRING TO A FOURTH PERSON WHO DISAPPEARED INTO BUSH FOLLOWING CRASH, BUT THIS NOT TAKEN VERY SERIOUSLY SINCE APPARENTLY NO ONE APPROACHED CRASH SCENE UNTIL FOLLOWING MORNING.) LOTTER'S BODY REPORTEDLY RETURNED TO SOUTH AFRICANS AT KATIMA MULILO ON OCT 13. TWO SURVIVORS RECOVERING IN MONGU HOSPITAL AND MAY BE TRANSFERRED TO LUSAKA FOR FURTHER LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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TREATMENT AND QUESTIONING BY ZAMBIAN AUTHORITIES.

2. ACCORDING ZAMBIAN PRESS ACCOUNTS, SURVIVORS SAY AIRCRAFT WAS BOUND FOR KATIMA MULILO IN CAPRIVI STRIP WHEN PILOT LOST DIRECTION AND RAN LOW ON FUEL. PILOT PUT DOWN ON ROAD INSIDE ZAMBIA AT ONE POINT TO ASK DIRECTIONS TO NEAREST AIRPORT AND WAS DIRECTED TO MONGU. ARRIVING OVER THAT TOWN AFTER DARK, HE WAS UNABLE TO FIND AIRSTRIP (WHICH UNLIGHTED) AND ATTEMPTED INSTEAD SET DOWN ON HIGHWAY. IN DOING SO AIRCRAFT'S WING HIT TREE AND PILOT LOST CONTROL. FOLGTWING CRASH, FUEL TANK EXPLODED.

3. ZAMBIAN OFFICIALS AND PRESS HAVE EXPRESSED SKEPTICISM THAT PILOT "LOST," NOTING THAT CRASH SITE NEARLY 300 KMS. INSIDE ZAMBIAN TERRITORY. FONMIN MWAANGA, DURING CONVERSATION WITH USIA DIRECTOR KEOGH AND AMBASSADOR ON OCT 11, DWELT AT LENGTH ON INCIDENT AND INDICATED HE FOUND IT VERY PUZZLING INDEED. ALSO SAID ON GROUNDS HUMANITARIANISM HIGH GOVERNMENT DECISION MADE TO CONTACT SOUTH AFRICANS AND ALLOW THEM TO COME FOR THEIR DEAD. ZAMBIAN PRESS HAD MADE MUCH OF ALLEGED RELUCTANCE OF SURVIVORS AT FIRST TO IDENTIFY THEMSELVES TO POLICE, DISCOVERY IN WRECKAGE OF CHARRED REMAINS OF IDENTIFICATION DOCUMENTS, AND EYE-WITNESS REPORTS THAT AIRCRAFT CIRCLED MONGU SEVERAL TIMES WITHOUT LIGHTS SHORTLY BEFORE CRASH.

4. COMMENT: IN LARGELY BARREN WESTERN PROVINCE IT QUITE POSSIBLE PILOT MAY HAVE GOTTEN OFF COURSE, PARTICULARLY IF HE USING ZAMBEZI RIVER, WHICH CHANGES DIRECTION FROM NORTH-SOUTH TO EAST-WEST AT KATIMO MULILO, AS GUIDE, ZAMBIANS, HOWEVER, SUSPECT THEY HAVE COUPLE OF SOUTH AFRICAN "GARY POWERS" (AS ONE PAPER PUT IT) ON THEIR HANDS AND ARE NOT LIKELY TO RELEASE TWO SURVIVORS UNTIL AFTER FULL AND THOROUGH INVESTIGATION.

WILKOWSKI

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: AIRCRAFT ACCIDENTS
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 16 OCT 1974
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: boyleja
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1974LUSAKA02132
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D740294-0587
From: LUSAKA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1974/newtext/t19741044/aaaabljn.tel
Line Count: 107
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION AF
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 2
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: n/a
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: boyleja
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 04 SEP 2002
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <04 SEP 2002 by cunninfx>; APPROVED <05 MAR 2003 by boyleja>
Review Markings:

Declassified/Released
US Department of State
EO Systematic Review
30 JUN 2005

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: SOUTH AFRICAN "MYSTERY PLANE" CRASH IN ZAMBIA
TAGS: EAIR, PBOR, SF, ZA
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005